

Complaints Policy

1 Introduction

At Ability we are committed to delivering excellent customer service and consider it to be critical to our success. Customer satisfaction is therefore key to how we measure the quality of our services.

There will be times when customers feel that we have fallen short of the standards we set. We therefore welcome complaints about the quality of our services and will always look to use these in order to learn and improve.

This Policy will also be used to review complaints made to us by stakeholders or members of the public.

This policy sets out Ability Housing's approach to receiving and handling complaints, ensuring that they are dealt with in a consistent and transparent way, and in accordance with the Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code.

This policy applies to all areas of the business and covers all complaints received from all residents, customers, and third parties making a complaint on their behalf.

For the purpose of this policy 'customers' means existing or potential tenants, residents and service users, leaseholders and a representative of any of the people mentioned above, who are authorised by them to make the complaint on their behalf. Ability has a detailed two stage procedure for dealing with complaints which adopts Good Practice Guidance on complaints handling.

2 Definition

For all Ability Services, a complaint is defined as:

“An expression of dissatisfaction, however made, about the standard of service, actions or lack of action by the organisation, its own staff, or those acting on its behalf, affecting an individual resident or group of residents”.

The customer does not have to use the word complaint for it to be treated as such.

Ability will endeavour to recognise the difference between a service request (pre-complaint), survey feedback and a formal complaint and take appropriate steps to resolve the issue for service users as early as possible.

3 Our Principles

Ability will listen to a complaint and carefully consider the customer's expectations and desired outcomes.

We will provide accessible means of giving feedback on our services.

We will aim to resolve a complaint as quickly as possible.

There are some instances where the issue raises will not be dealt with via the complaints process, these are:

- If the complaint relates to an ongoing legal matter.

- A first request for service, information or an explanation of our policies and procedures.
- Reported cases of neighbour disputes and anti-social behaviour will not be dealt with through the complaints process, unless the complaint is about how a case has been dealt with.
- A claim being dealt with by our insurers.
- If the complaint is directed at the contents of our policies, we may be limited in the resolution that we can come to, however we will use this information when carrying out policy reviews.

Complaints should be made within a reasonable period which would normally be within six months of the matter occurring. In exceptional circumstances we may decide to respond to a complaint outside of this timescale.

We are committed to ensuring that our staff are treated with respect. To protect our staff, we will not engage with any threatening or abusive behaviour, or vexatious complaints. We will deal with any unacceptable behaviour or vexatious complaints under the relevant policies.

Making a complaint will not result in any adverse changes to the services received from us.

4 Complaints Procedure

Any person is able to express dissatisfaction about the services we provide.

Complaints can be made in person, over the telephone, by letter, by email, website or any social media platform.

All complaints will be recorded and used to help improve our services.

When a complaint is made we will aim to resolve it as quickly as possible.

If a report is received or we suspect that abuse or neglect is taking place, we will refer to our Safeguarding policies and procedures. Allegations of abuse and neglect can also be reported directly to the local authority.

5 Dealing with complaints

Anyone can make a complaint on behalf of the customer.

If a third party is making a complaint on behalf of the customer Ability will require consent from the Complainant before corresponding with them. If someone has made a complaint on behalf of a customer, Ability will respond directly to the customer and send a copy to the third party who made the complaint on their behalf.

If we receive an anonymous complaint that raises a safeguarding or whistleblowing issue, this will be dealt with under the relevant policy. Our ability to fully explore and feedback on the issue may be limited due to the nature of anonymous complaints. We will record, investigate and monitor anonymous complaints in the same way that we treat other feedback.

We will contact the complainant by their preferred method within 5 working days to acknowledge receiving their complaint.

If the timescales need to be changed for any reason, we will agree a new timescale with the complainant.

We will keep the complainant informed throughout the investigation of the complaint.

Stage 1 decision: 10 working days from the receipt of the complaint. Where this is not possible an explanation and a date by when the stage one response should be received will be provided. This should not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason.

The written response will detail any follow up actions that are required to resolve the complaint and a timescale given for when these are expected to be complete.

Stage 2 response: A response will be sent within 20 working days from the request to escalate, if this is not possible an explanation and a date when the response will be given to the complainant. This will not exceed a further 10 working days without good reason

6 Compensation

In some cases, compensation may be requested by the complainant or payable to a complainant where a complaint is upheld. All compensation requests or payments will be agreed by a member of the Senior Management Team and calculated based on the impact of the service failure on the customer.

7.1 Process

Ability's process on complaints is as follows:

Informal complaint:

When the customer first contacts us, the relevant member of staff must attempt to resolve the problem.

This will usually be one of our frontline staff and they will try and resolve the issue and look for a prompt resolution.

An explanation should be provided to the customer that their complaint is being managed as an informal complaint first but if they remain dissatisfied this can be escalated to a formal complaint verbally with immediate effect.

If escalated to a formal complaint the Complaints Team will contact the complainant to acknowledge the complaint and inform them of the next steps.

Formal complaint stages

Stage 1 decision:

Ability will accept a complaint in the most suitable manner for the customer (this can be in person, in writing, by telephone, through a designated third party).

This complaint will be assigned to a Lead Manager, as defined in the procedure, who will investigate and respond to the complaint in writing.

Complainants will receive a written response within 10 working days. The written response will detail any follow up actions that are required to resolve the complaint and a timescale given for when these are expected to be complete.

Learning outcomes must be recorded, capturing any changes or improvement to services or ways of working that the matter has helped identify and learn from.

Stage 2 response:

On the conclusion of the stage one decision process if the customer remains unhappy the complaint should be escalated for a stage two response.

The stage 2 response will be carried out by a member of the Senior Management Team (SMT) or a member of the Board with support from a Tenant Representative as required. There may also be occasions where, if appropriate, SMT and Board may nominate another suitable staff member to respond on their behalf.

The stage 2 responder will contact the customer directly to discuss the complaint and the customer will receive a final written response within 20 working days of the date of the stage one escalation. This stage 2 response concludes Ability's complaints policy and procedure.

7.2 Referral of complaints to Housing Ombudsman

Should the customer remain dissatisfied on conclusion of the Stage 2 response process, they should be directed to the Ombudsman for an independent review of their complaint.

7.3 Performance indicators

A report will be presented to the Senior Management Team monthly, the Customer Panel quarterly, and the Customer Services Committee 6 monthly. It will include information on:

- the number of complaints at each stage and the outcome
- the amount of and reasons for compensation offered (if any)
- performance in meeting response targets
- complaints data by key service areas
- Complaints investigated by the Independent Housing Ombudsman
- Key learning outcomes

Board will be presented with a report 6 monthly which will include information on:

- Current Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code: Self-assessment form
- Serious complaints
- Significant learnings

We will use complaints as a tool to continuously improve our services. We will discuss trends and improvement opportunities with the local managers, Senior Management Team, the Customer Panel, the Customer Services Committee and the Quality Management Review Group.

8 Review

This policy will be reviewed annually as a minimum. We will use learning and scrutiny to improve the policy prior to formal review. Date of next review March 2022.